

The Continuation of the Cycle of Rebirth and Its Cessation

The main purpose of all Buddhist doctrines is to unveil dissatisfaction and the cessation of dissatisfaction. In other words, the Buddha's attempt was to describe the path of happiness or liberation. Liberation or happiness of beings completely depends on purifying one's mind. Here it is very important to understand what mental states steal our peace of mind and how to overcome those thoughts.

The main reason that we suffer is unwholesome thoughts such as greed, jealousy, anger, ill will, lamentation, lust and ignorance. Also, if we are happy, our mind fills with wholesome thoughts such as generosity, loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, tranquility and wisdom. In this situation, the way to get rid of suffering is reducing unwholesome thoughts and increasing wholesome thoughts.

According to Buddhism, all unwholesome thoughts can be included into three. They are;

1. Craving - Greed (*Lobha*)
2. Anger (*Dosa*)
3. Delusion (*Moha*)

These are the main unwholesome mental states (defilements) which disturb our peace of mind. If we have more unwholesome emotions, it means we have more suffering. If we have less defilements, it means we have less suffering. If someone needs to live happily, he has to reduce these defilements. Desire means the attachment as lust, craving or greed. Anger means conflict as ill will. Delusion means unknowing of the world reality or ignorance of impermanence. Among those three defilements, ignorance is the worst unwholesome state.

Our success in the path of liberation depends on how far we have reduced these three unwholesome thoughts. We can see two levels on the path of reducing defilements. First level is the surface level. **Here to reduce greed, lust or attachment, we can practice generosity and contemplate on the impurity of body parts.** Also, the path of reducing anger or hatred is to practice loving kindness and virtue. Though we can eradicate greed and anger using these techniques, it is a temporary solution. The second level is a deeper level. It is the ultimate and permanent solution. In the second level, our vision is completely changed into the correct way that helps to eradicate defilements completely. **The path of eradication of all defilements entirely is that practicing mindfulness and mindful meditation.**

Ignorance or delusion can be explained in several stages. The very first step is unknowing the karmic force. Some people think that things in our lives happen because of the creative god or an accident (or without any reasons). However, the main thing which decides our life is mind. Mind is the forerunner; mind is the chief. Mind made are they. If someone speaks or acts with a wicked mind, suffering follows him because of polluted mind. Even as the wheel of hoof follows the drought ox. Further, if someone speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows him. Even as the shadow never leaves him. In this situation it is very clear that the karmic force plays a main

role in our life. Having this understanding helps us to overcome some levels of ignorance but not completely. Though someone gets this understanding and does good activities in this level, he is still in the Sansaric circle. That is why Buddhism points out another way to overcome ignorance and the Sansaric circle. Here it is very important to understand the absolute truth which depends on the four noble truths and the dependent origination.

By listening to the Buddha's teaching, we gradually go forward on the path of liberation. In the first level of reducing defilements, we can practice generosity to reduce desire. When we are ready to donate something to others concerning their qualities or needs, our mind is free from desire. Then greed in mind gradually decreases. Further when we practice loving kindness for all people in the world, anger also decreases. We mostly lose our inner peace because of anger. Also, people mostly suffer because of anger. Practicing loving kindness helps us to reduce anger and ill will. That is why the Buddha has recommended practicing loving kindness at the very beginning on the path of liberation. As the result of practicing loving kindness, we begin to see all beings as our only child. Then most of our conflicts with people cease. This attitude is the highest in spiritual development. Practicing loving kindness is one of the signs that we are on the path of liberation from suffering and unsatisfactoriness. To decrease delusion, we should be knowledgeable about the world and ourselves. The Karmic law means that we have done in our past lives and what we do in this life affects our future lives as well as this life. The Karmic law is a big shadow which acts behind us. If we have this knowledge about the karmic law, our patience gradually increases when problems come to our life. In addition, the knowledge that everything is impermanent also increases. The experience that we receive through our senses arises and ceases instantly. If we have this understanding, we are able to live equally in sufferable or pleasurable situations.

One day the Supreme Buddha announced the monks,

“Abandon one thing, bhikkhus, and I guarantee you non-returning. What is that one thing? Delusion is that one thing, bhikkhus. Abandon that and I guarantee you non-returning.”

“Ekadhammaṃ, bhikkhave, pajahatha; ahaṃ vo pāṭibhogo anāgāmitāya. Katamaṃ ekadhammaṃ? Mohaṃ, bhikkhave, ekadhammaṃ pajahatha; ahaṃ vo pāṭibhogo anāgāmitāyā”ti. Etamatthaṃ bhagavā avoca. Tatthetaṃ iti vuccati:

Beings confused by delusion. Go to rebirth in a bad bourn.
But having rightly understood delusion, those with insight abandon it.
By abandoning it they never come Back to this world again.

*“Yena mohena mūlhāse, sattā gacchanti duggatiṃ;
Taṃ mohaṃ sammadaññāya, pajahanti vipassino;
Pahāya na punāyanti, imaṃ lokaṃ kudācānan”ti.*

The main reason for all defilements is ignorance. The entire success of spiritual development completely depends on how far ignorance is reduced. Reducing ignorance depends

on how far wisdom increases. The Buddha says there are four factors which cause the development of wisdom. They are;

1. Association with a good friend who explains the Buddha's real message
2. Listening to or reading the Buddha's Message
3. Wise Reflection
4. Practice it as tranquility and insight meditation

In the second level, we go deeper to reduce defilements permanently. Here, knowledge, reflection and practice are very important. We have attachment and anger because of unknowing of experience. The nature of all our experience is instant. The experience that we receive with our senses arises and ceases at the moment according to conditions. When conditions come together, the experiences as forms, sounds, smell, taste, touch, mental formations arise at the moment. The experience doesn't come to the present from the past. And it doesn't go to the future from the present. **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence.** (අනුත්වා සම්භූතං නුත්වා න භවිස්සති). When conditions separate, the experience ceases without anything remaining. This is the reality that we experience every moment. However, because of our ignorance we think that the experience remains after experience. We live in the ceased experience every time we think of something. This is the main cause of suffering. If we have this knowledge about the cause of suffering, we reflect on it again and again in our daily life. And also, we try to eradicate defilements permanently by practicing the path leading to the cessation from suffering. To understand this reality we should practice the three disciplines as the Buddha has kindly advised.

Madhupindika Sutta in Majjhima Nikaya explains how the world arises and ceases.

The arising of the world

If someone contacts the world by six senses with ignorance, suffering follows him. The discourse explains it thus; **Eye consciousness arises dependent on the eye and sights. The meeting of the three is contact. Contact is a condition for feeling. What you feel, you perceive. What you perceive, you think about. What you think about, you proliferate. What you proliferate about is the source from which a person is beset by concepts of identity that emerge from the proliferation of perceptions. This occurs with respect to sights known by the eye in the past, future, and present."**

When there is the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind, thoughts, and mind consciousness, it's possible to point out what's known as 'contact'. ... When there is what's known as thought, it's possible to point out what's known as 'being beset by concepts of identity that emerge from the proliferation of perceptions'.

When someone is ignorant at the moment, everything we contact is ignorant with suffering. As the amount of ignorance, we have to suffer.

The cessation of the world

If someone contacts the world by six senses without ignorance (with wisdom), he can overcome suffering. **"When there is no eye, no sights, and no eye consciousness, it's not possible to point out what's known as 'contact'. When there isn't what's known as contact, it's not possible to point out what's known as 'feeling'. When there isn't what's known as feeling, it's not possible to point out what's known as 'perception'. When there isn't what's known as perception, it's not possible to point out what's known as 'thought'. When there isn't what's known as thought, it's not possible to point out what's known as 'being beset by concepts of identity that emerge from the proliferation of perceptions."**

When there is no ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind, no thoughts, and no mind consciousness, it's not possible to point out what's known as 'contact'. ... When there isn't what's known as thought, it's not possible to point out what's known as 'being beset by concepts of identity that emerge from the proliferation of perceptions'.

If someone wants to overcome the world and suffering, the Supreme Buddha pointed out the path very clearly in the discourse of Jata.

Once upon a time, when the Buddha was at Savatti, a Brahman, namely, Jata came to the Buddha. After exchanging greetings with the Buddha, he sat beside the Buddha. As he was sitting there, he addressed the Buddha with a verse:

Antojaṭṭā bahijaṭṭā Jaṭāya jaṭitā pajā,

Taṃ taṃ gotama pucchāmi Ko imaṃ vijaṭṭaye jaṭan"ti.

"A tangle inside, a tangle outside, this generation is entangled in a tangle.
I ask you this, O Gotama, who can disentangle this tangle?"

As the answer for the question of the Brahman, the Buddha explained these verses.

"Sīle patiṭṭhāya naro sapañño Cittaṃ paññañca bhāvayaṃ;

Ātāpī nipako bhikkhu So imaṃ vijaṭṭaye jaṭan".

A man established in virtue, discerning, developing discernment & mind,
a monk ardent, astute: he can untangle this tangle.

According to the above discourse, the Supreme Buddha proclaims three disciplines as the path of liberation. They are;

1. *Sīla* - සීල - Virtue - Morality
2. *Samādhi* - සමාධි - Tranquility - Concentration
3. *Paññā* - පාඤ්ඤා - Wisdom - Reflecting on impermanence

With the clear knowledge of the cessation of suffering, we form self-discipline in our speech and behavior. Before we act or speak, we reflect on it again and again whether it is good or bad, right or wrong, whether it is useful in this life and hereafter. As much as we have this

discipline in our behavior, we make no mistakes. We can remember our life with a pleasant mind because of our good behavior. This discipline in our behavior and speech helps us to go forward in the path of purification. Virtue or moral conduct is the foundation of the spiritual path. Therefore, the Buddha has mostly pointed out the importance of practicing virtue. Discipline in senses is also very important and useful for a successful moral life. Because of virtuous life we are honored in the society where we live.

In purification of the mind, we mainly use two meditation techniques that are tranquility (or concentration) and insight. In the tranquility meditation, we keep our mind with a particular good thought. As a result of concentrated mind, we can live for a long time without suffering and stress, but it is not permanent and it can be changed. Here we practice and develop our awareness especially in mind and body. We practice to do all kinds of activities mindfully. Mindfulness is one of the most important qualities that we have to develop for purification of our mind. Also, mindfulness helps us to keep our mind in the present moment. The nature of our mind is going to the past and future without awareness. By practicing tranquility meditation, we train our mind to live in the present moment with mindfulness. And when the mind goes to the past or future, we are aware of it. There are forty techniques in Buddhism to develop mindfulness. When we practice those techniques with right understanding, we don't stop only in concentration. We go forward seeing world reality which is impermanence.

Only concentration is not enough to eradicate defilements completely. That is why Buddhism advises us to develop another step that is insight meditation for permanent happiness. Here, with the concentrated mind, we reflect on all kinds of things mental and physical on three characteristics of existence (ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ). They are;

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|------------------------|-----------------|---|---------|
| i. Impermanence | - <i>Anicca</i> | - | අනිත්‍ය |
| ii. Unsatisfactoriness | - <i>Dukkha</i> | - | දුක්ඛ |
| iii. Selflessness | - <i>Anatta</i> | - | අනාත්ම |

We reflect again and again on these three characteristics of existence (*Tilakkhana*-ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ). As a result of practicing this world reality, we develop wisdom with the knowledge of impermanence. Simultaneously, we develop five qualities which are confidence (*Saddha*-සද්ධා), effort (*Viriya* - විරිය), mindfulness (*Sati* - සති), concentration (*Samadhi* - සමාධි) and wisdom (*Paññā* - පඤ්ඤ). As the result of practicing The Noble Eightfold Path with mindfulness and wisdom, we gradually reach the real happiness decreasing defilements. Final experience of this is living in the present moment with full awareness seeing arising and ceasing without any desirable attachment or destruction. It means we have overcome unsatisfactoriness and suffering. As soon as we get any experience in our senses, we are able to see them as impermanent. We understand that it was not there before the experience, and also nothing remaining after the experience. Every moment of our experience arises when conditions are together, and the experience ceases when conditions separate. This is the ultimate truth that we have to realize for the ultimate goal that is the liberation, Nibbana.

This is the path that leads us to reduce the three defilements. As the result of practicing the tree disciplines, we gradually decrease unwholesome thoughts and achieve real happiness. This is the real success in our life because it helps us to live in the noble bliss of liberation.

Practicing mindfulness leads to liberation. That is why the Buddha said the one and only way;

For the purification of beings (*sattānam visuddhiyā*),
 For the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation (*sokapariddavānam samatikkhamāya*),
 For the destruction of pain and grief (*dukkhadomanassānam attamgamāya*),
 For the gaining of knowledge (*ñāyassa adigamāya*)
 For the attaining (or realization) of Nibbana (or enlightenment) (*nibbānassa saccikiriya*)
 which is practicing the fourfold mindfulness.

Actually, if we can practice mindfulness with right understanding and reflecting on impermanence as the Buddha mentioned, all other qualities increase gradually. Therefore, we should try to be mindful about our mind and body always. Practicing mindfulness means that we are on the path of liberation.



May the Triple Gem Bless You!

තෙරුවන් සරණයි!

May All Beings be Mindful & Wise!

(සියලු සත්ත්වයෝ සතිමත් සහ නුවණැත්තෝ වෙත්වා!)

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